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# Highly multiplexed and quantitative cell-surface protein profiling using genetically barcoded antibodies

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Contributed by James A. Wells, January 29, 2018 (sent for review December 19, 2017; reviewed by Paul J. Carter and Stephen W. Michnick)

Human cells express thousands of different surface proteins that can be used for cell classification, or to distinguish healthy and disease conditions. A method capable of profiling a substantial fraction of the surface proteome simultaneously and inexpensively would enable more accurate and complete classification of cell states. We present a highly multiplexed and quantitative surface proteomic method using genetically barcoded antibodies called phage-antibody next-generation sequencing (PhaNGS). Using 144 preselected antibodies displayed on filamentous phage (Fab-phage) against 44 receptor targets, we assess changes in B cell surface proteins after the development of drug resistance in a patient with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) and in adaptation to oncogene expression in a Myc-inducible Burkitt lymphoma model. We further show PhaNGS can be applied at the single-cell level. Our results reveal that a common set of proteins including FLT3, NCR3LG1, and ROR1 dominate the response to similar oncogenic perturbations in B cells. Linking high-affinity, selective, genetically encoded binders to NGS enables direct and highly multiplexed protein detection, comparable to RNA-sequencing for mRNA. PhaNGS has the potential to profile a substantial fraction of the surface proteome simultaneously and inexpensively to enable more accurate and complete classification of cell states.

phage display | NGS | cell surface proteomics | biomarkers | leukemia

Next-generation sequencing (NGS) has revolutionized our ability to sensitively and broadly detect and quantify DNA and RNA sequences, even at the single-cell level (1, 2). Although RNA-sequencing (RNAseq) is sensitive and highly multiplexed, mRNA levels do not necessarily correlate with protein abundance (3). Here we describe an approach for multiplexed detection of membrane proteins on cells using genetically barcoded antibody-phage.

Key to the technology we call phage-antibody NGS (PhaNGS) is a collection of defined fragment antibodies (Fabs) previously selected to bind specific targets of interest using high-throughput phage display (*SI Appendix, Fig. S1*) (4–6). Each Fab-phage was selected from a large synthetic Fab library (~10<sup>10</sup> unique sequences) built from a stable, VH3-Vκ1-based Trastuzumab scaffold (7) and validated for affinity and selectivity. The selected Fabs are genetically encoded and displayed on a phage particle that packages its specific Fab gene within (*Fig. 1A*). Taking inspiration from previous work that linked deep sequencing and phage libraries (8), we reasoned that the individual Fab-phage can be distinguished and quantified by NGS of the highly variable complementarity determining region (CDR) H3 loop, which represents both the major binding determinant of the encoded Fab and a unique DNA barcode. The fixed scaffold in which the CDR is embedded allows the use of a common set of primers flanking the H3 region for amplification and sequencing (*SI Appendix, Fig. S2*) (9). We hypothesized that a pool of preselected Fab-phage specific for a defined set of extracellular proteins would bind their cognate proteins on cells at levels in proportion to receptor abundance and allow for target quantification by NGS (*Fig. 1B*). The displayed Fab is attached to the phage on the

opposite end from its antigen binding site and is known to retain virtually the same affinity for its target as when expressed as soluble Fab (*SI Appendix, Fig. S3*) (10).

## Results

**Validation of the PhaNGS Method in Model Experiments.** To assess the feasibility of the approach, we used simple phage titering to measure binding of an anti-GFP Fab-phage (GFP-phage) to HeLa cells engineered to express a membrane-anchored GFP or parental (*Fig. 1C*). After binding and washing, we found 400 times more phage on the GFP-expressing cells than control cells. A control Fab-phage directed to the intracellular transcription factor ZNF2 showed similar low-titer binding to either cell line.

To assess the sensitivity of detection of GFP-phage, we immobilized varying concentrations of GFP on beads ranging from about 2 pM to 20 μM. Eluted phage titers were linear over a 4-log range and showed detectable signal over background (defined as BSA binding) with as little as 30 pM of immobilized GFP (*Fig. 1D*). We also observed that the fractional recovery of GFP-phage

## Significance

Next-generation sequencing (NGS) has allowed the comprehensive study of the genome and transcriptome. However, a similarly broad, highly multiplexed, and inexpensive method for proteomics using NGS remains elusive. Here, we describe a phage display-based method using preselected antibodies that are genetically encoded and capable of simultaneous profiling of hundreds of cell-surface targets on cells in culture or singly at low cost and without the need for chemical conjugation to purified antibodies. We use the method to identify cell-surface proteins that change in cancer cells, some of which are coordinately regulated and could lead to new biomarkers and cancer targets.

Author contributions: S.B.P. and J.A.W. designed research; S.B.P., Y.M., A.J.M., and H.G. performed research; S.B.P., A.H., Y.M., A.J.M., O.J., M.H., L.P., J.J.A., M.M., S.S.S., and J.M. contributed new reagents/analytic tools; S.B.P., Y.M., A.J.M., M.H., J.J.A., H.G., and J.A.W. analyzed data; and S.B.P. and J.A.W. wrote the paper.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data deposition: The sequencing data that support the findings of this study are available in the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo> [accession nos. [GSE102712](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE102712) (for PhaNGS data) and [GSE102301](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE102301) (for RNA-sequencing data)]. All other data supporting the findings of this study are available in the *SI Appendix, Dataset S3*.

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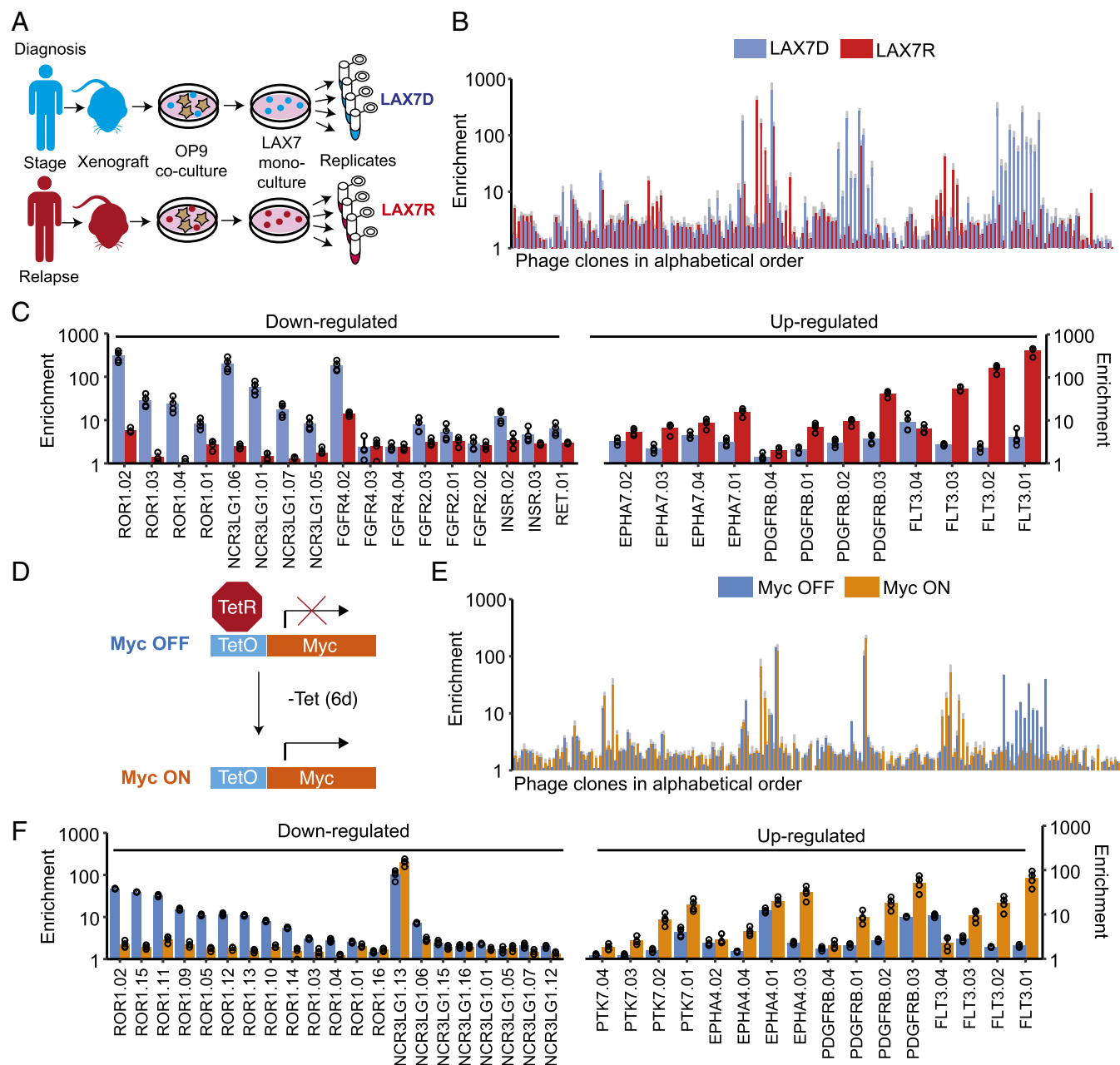
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**Fig. 2.** PhaNGS profiling of surface proteomes at diagnosis and relapse in a patient with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). (A) Bone marrow samples obtained from a patient diagnosed with ALL (Ph-negative) at diagnosis (LAX7D) and relapse (LAX7R) were grown as xenografts into immune-compromised NOD/SCID- $\gamma$ <sup>−</sup> mice, cocultured with OP9 cells, and later frozen as monoculture stocks. Samples were thawed and expanded in culture 1 wk before the PhaNGS profile experiment. Both cell populations were positive for CD10, CD19, and CD45. The LAX7R resistance sample possessed a KRAS<sup>G12V</sup> mutation not detected at diagnosis. (B) PhaNGS profiles for 144 different Fab-phages (SI Appendix, Datasets S1 and S3) directed to 44 different membrane targets were allowed to bind to LAX7D (blue) or LAX7R (red) cells. The average value from four replicates, with SD (gray bars), is shown. (C) Targets are shown that were down- or up-regulated from LAX7D to LAX7R. (D) Experimental scheme for the P493-6 cell line in MycOFF and MycON conditions. Myc was repressed for 48 h with the addition of Tet (100 ng/mL, twice per day). The MycOFF state was harvested, Tet was washed out, and the cells recovered for 6 d before the MycON condition was harvested. (E) The extended bar chart displays the results of the PhaNGS profiling for the MycOFF to MycON experiment (blue and orange bars, respectively). The average value from four replicates, with SD (gray bars), is shown. (F) Targets are presented that were down- or up-regulated when transitioning from MycOFF to MycON.

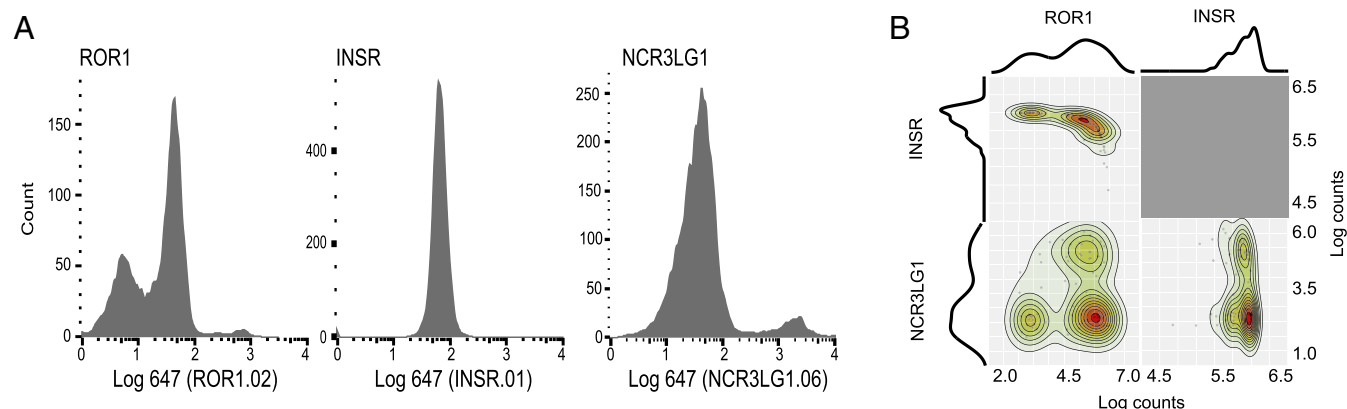
represents a major target of interest in ALL, chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), and other leukemias (18–20). Despite the variation in NGS signal between Fab-phage against the same target, the ratio of the average fold-change between the LAX7D and LAX7R states for a family of antibodies was consistent, providing additional confidence in the changes observed (SI Appendix, Fig. S8.4). The variation in relative NGS signal for antibodies to

the same targets is likely due to signal suppression for the weakly bound antibodies, since signal-to-noise is less.

We also performed RNAseq on the LAX7D and LAX7R samples and identified 11 transcripts for which targets were also present in the PhaNGS dataset (SI Appendix, Fig. S9). There was a weak correlation in the fold-change for the common targets (Pearson correlation coefficient,  $R = 0.17$ ), possibly reflecting







**Fig. 4.** Single-cell PhaNGS on P493-6 cells. (A) Flow cytometry histograms on a population of P493-6 MycON cells ( $n = 12,000$ ), using purified Fabs for ROR1 (clone ROR1.02, *Left*), insulin receptor (clone INSR.01, *Middle*), and NCR3LG1 (clone NCR3LG1.06, *Right*). Log fluorescence values are indicated on the x axis (anti-FLAG-APC). ROR1 shows bimodal expression with a small low-signal peak and large high-signal peak, INSR shows unimodal expression, and NCR3LG1 shows bimodal expression with a large low-signal peak and small high-signal peak. (B) Results from single-cell PhaNGS using the corresponding ROR1, INSR, and NCR3LG1 Fab-phage antibodies on 84 individual P493-6 cells match observations from flow cytometry.

encoded and renewable (*SI Appendix, Table S1*). This compares with expensive and perishable antibody reagents needed for probe conjugation using other technologies. Although the PhaNGS experiments presented here were conducted with fewer than 200 unique Fab-phages, we estimate that PhaNGS could profile a target multiplicity of tens of thousands based on experiments using dilute input libraries.

Given the growing interest in the development of renewable antibodies (32) and the ability to industrialize their selection (5), we believe the PhaNGS technology will undergo tremendous growth in the size of the probe library in the next few years. Moreover, the application of microfluidic technology to the method will increase its use for single-cell analysis and could allow for simultaneous RNAseq-PhaNGS experiments. The method may also be amenable to alternative display systems such as ribosome display (33). Having identified Fab-phage hits, one can easily transition the recombinant antibody into a multitude of detection or bioengineered formats such as antibody–drug conjugates (ADCs), bispecific T-cell engagers (BiTEs), or chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells. We believe the PhaNGS method will have general utility to profile how cell-surface proteins change in health and disease. Such data will be useful for identifying new combinatorial biomarkers and drug targets.

## Materials and Methods

**Patient Samples.** Patient-derived leukemia samples were collected with informed consent from all participants according to NCI/Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program-approved protocol ECOG E2993T5 and studied with approval of the Institutional Review Boards of the University of California San Francisco (UCSF). The samples were taken as bone marrow biopsies, blast content >80%.

**Preparing Phage Input Libraries.** The PhaNGS input pool was constructed as follows: 5  $\mu$ L of each clone was transferred to respective wells of a 96-well round-bottom plate (Corning). Then, 100  $\mu$ L log phase XL-1 blue cells (Agilent, OD<sub>600</sub> = 0.6–0.7) were added to each well before the plate was covered in a gas-permeable film (Diversified Biotech) and placed at 37 °C for 20 min. We then transferred 100  $\mu$ L of infected cells to respective wells of a 96-well deep-well plate (Corning Axygen) containing 400  $\mu$ L per well 2xYT broth with 100  $\mu$ g/mL carbenicillin and 10<sup>10</sup> cfu/mL KO7 helper phage (NEB).

The deep-well plate was covered in a gas-permeable film and shaken at 1000 rpm and 37 °C for 18–24 h in an Infors HT shaker. Plates were spun down at 4,000  $g$  for 15 min at room temperature, and the supernatant was consolidated into 50 mL tubes before adding 0.02% sodium azide and storing at 4 °C. This method leads to approximately equal quantities of each clone from a propagated supernatant (roughly 10<sup>11</sup> cfu/mL total).

**Panning Phage on Cells.** Cells were washed once (to remove media, DMSO) by spinning the cells down at 300  $g$  for 5 min at 4 °C, pouring off the supernatant into liquid waste, resuspending in 1 mL cold PBS, spinning down, and decanting again. The final drops during decanting were removed by inverting and dabbing the tube on a paper towel. The washed cell pellet was then resuspended in 1 mL of the input phage mixture prepared above. The tube was end-over-end rotated for 20 min at 4 °C before spinning down and decanting as above. Cells were then washed four times with PBS, transferring to fresh 2 mL Eppendorf tubes, and inverting to coat the walls each time. To elute cell-bound phage, the pellet was resuspended in 900  $\mu$ L of 0.1 M acetic acid, pH 2–3, allowed to sit for 5 min, spun down, and 800  $\mu$ L of the acid eluent was transferred to a 1.5 mL Eppendorf tube containing 100  $\mu$ L 1 M Tris, pH 7.5, to neutralize. The neutralized solution was propagated as described above for the input pool or by flask (see *SI Appendix*). After propagation for 16 to 18 h, 50  $\mu$ L of propagated phage were transferred to a 96-well PCR plate and boiled.

For single-cell experiments, instead of elution, single cells were sorted by forward and side scatter (or fluorescence) into each well of a 96-well plate containing 50  $\mu$ L of 2xYT broth, then propagated via addition of 100  $\mu$ L log phase XL-1 culture.

**Amplification and Purification.** The H3 “barcode” of each phagemid was amplified using boiled propagate template and flanking primers using Phusion polymerase (NEB). See *Dataset S4* for primer design. The complete mix was then thermocycled for 12 cycles. Those samples showing bands by agarose gel were combined, gel purified, and submitted to a sequencing facility for analysis on a HiSeq4000 (Illumina) with a custom sequencing primer (order as shown): TGAGGACACTGCCGTCTATTATTGTGCTCGC ( $T_m = 67$  °C, GC% = 52).

**Mass Spectrometry.** Cell samples were generated by SILAC as described previously (34). Mass spectrometry work-up was performed as described previously (35). Samples were run on a Q-Exactive Mass Spectrometer (ThermoScientific Inc.). Data were analyzed using MaxQuant (36). Median SILAC ratio values were used to determine fold-change values between conditions.

**Code Availability.** See <https://github.com/sbpollock/PhaNGS-counting> for scripts and details on how to convert “.fastq.gz” sequencing files into counts. See *Dataset S3* for details on how these counts are interpreted.

**Statistics.** Error bars represent SD, which was calculated using Excel’s STDEV.P function (see *Dataset S3*). Student’s  $t$  test was performed using Excel’s T.TEST function (two-tailed, homoscedastic).

**Data Archival.** The sequencing data that support the findings of this study are available in the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO) with the identifier GSE102712 for PhaNGS data and GSE102301 for RNAseq data. All other data supporting the findings of this study are available within the *SI Appendix, Dataset S3*.

